

Kajang Redemption

The True Story of

**Sam
Kian
Seng**

He Walked Out from a

Natural
Life Sentence
to Freedom

By **Sam Kian Seng**
as told to **Stephen Ng**

Kajang Redemption

The book title is a reference to **Shawshank Redemption**, a movie based on a novel by Stephen King, in which Andy Dufresne was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences at the Shawshank State Penitentiary but eventually walked free. In this case, Sam Kian Seng was expected to be in Kajang Prison till the end of his life, but he was miraculously pardoned and released.



Stephen Ng is a writer who contributes regularly to a number of Malaysian publications, online news portals and Christian-based media. A passionate writer, he has authored several biographies of ordinary Malaysians.

“ *I am certain that the things that happened in my life were God’s lessons for me, preparing me to face the future. I believe God has worked all things out for good according to His perfect plan and timing, and He continues to do so. I look forward to see what He has in store for me ahead.* ”

– Sam Kian Seng



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CONTENTS

Foreword	6
Introduction: This is His Story	10
Chapter 1: The Robbery	13
Chapter 2: Childhood Days	22
Chapter 3: My Journey Begins	28
Chapter 4: Behind the Walls of Pudu Jail	34
Chapter 5: To Kajang for Life.....	40
Chapter 6: Changed Lives	51
Chapter 7: Released a Free Man	59

Foreword by Wong Chun Wai

Sam Kian Seng taught me a lesson that I will never forget. When I visited him at Kajang Prison, he told me that the word ‘hopeless’ begins with the root word, ‘Hope.’

We had just met and he was sharing with me, with great enthusiasm, how he wanted to work for a Christian-based non-governmental organisation.

I looked at him in bewilderment. I was staring at a prisoner serving natural life imprisonment. Not life imprisonment but natural life. That means he would die inside the prison.

How could I ever get his sentence reduced, let alone get him out of prison? But this man had complete faith. Not in me but in God. Rightly so.

Sam was absolutely convinced that I would get him pardoned by the King. I had to tell him that I did not know the King. His armed robbery crime was committed in Kuala Lumpur and that meant only the King could pardon him.

If it had been in Selangor, I could possibly have sought the intervention of His Royal Highness the Sultan of Selangor.

In fact, Sam should have been on death penalty because he was in possession of a gun illegally but he escaped the gallows.

That was the message conveyed to me by the Attorney-General’s Chambers as I began the campaign later for his pardon.

Here he was, a man who was persistent and fully trusting God, who would not give up hope of being released from life imprisonment.

I could see in him his undying love and great desire for God. Even in the most hopeless situations, he knew that God would not give anything but the best to His children. After

all, we believe in the God of Hope.

As I look back, it was indeed a miracle how I came to know this man. I had received a phone call from a very high-ranking officer at Kajang Prison one day, who told me to help with Sam's application for clemency.

I was impressed that this university alumnus of mine, himself a Muslim, told me that he could testify to Sam's changed life. He could see that Sam was deserving of nothing short of a royal pardon.

While in prison, Sam was making a big impact on the lives of other prisoners. In the words of my friend, he "turned hard-core gangsters into God-fearing church mice".

I did not have much faith in securing Sam a royal pardon, but eventually, it was Sam's unwavering faith in God that motivated me to do something within the capacity that God has strategically placed me.

With the help of a prominent businessman, we finally managed to secure a royal pardon for Sam. As a free man Sam's story is a compelling testimony of a risen Saviour, and I am truly humbled to have played a small part in his life's episodes.

Sam's pardon was among the last duties carried out by the late King, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah. The ruler of the northern state of Kedah made history when he became Malaysia's King for the second time in 2012, after having served for the first time in 1970 under the country's rotational system for appointing its King or Yang di-Pertuan Agung.

Tuanku Abdul Halim ended his term as the 14th King in December 2016 and was replaced by the Kelantan Ruler, Sultan Muhammad V.

I wish Sam many more years of fruitful outreach to people whom society has long given up hope on.

God works in truly mysterious ways, and I am deeply honoured that the Lord has chosen me, His humble servant, to carry out this duty.

I must specifically mention two gentlemen, Tan Sri Barry Goh and Johan Abdullah, who went to great lengths

to ensure that Sam would be pardoned.

My thanks go to Angeline Lim who helped to edit this book, and my colleague at The Star Media Group, Tung Eng Hwa, for designing the book cover.

I also wish to thank my employer for facilitating the use of the archives and photo studio to make this book a reality.

Star Media Group chief executive officer and group managing director, Wong Chun Wai meeting Sam Kian Seng after his release.





Introduction: This is His Story

At 2.05pm on Monday July 25, 2016, Sam Kian Seng, 59, walked out of Kajang Prison a free man.

Just 31 years old when he was arrested in 1988, he was sentenced to natural life imprisonment for possession of a dangerous weapon, and spent a total of 28 years in the now defunct Pudu Jail and Kajang Prison.

Once a notorious gangster who had terrorised the streets of Chow Kit, Sam had come to terms with the probability that he would die in prison. But his life took an unexpected turn when he received a royal pardon with the help of a community of supportive individuals who campaigned tirelessly for his release.

Malaysian Care staffer Daniel Liew had reached out to Sam when he was in Kajang prison. Church activist Samuel Ho, as well as a high ranking prison officer, had separately brought his case to the attention of the Star Media Group managing director and chief executive officer Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai. Prison wardens who readily acknowledged the transformation in Sam's life also supported his application for clemency.

The appeal was made to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in 2016 and miraculously, Sam was pardoned on the basis of good behaviour.

Sam attributes his release wholly to God. He is also very thankful to the many who had prayed for him while he was in prison. Their prayers, he says, brought him to a crossroads and he decided to turn over a new leaf. The transformation was not immediate, but it was a 180-degree turn. It was a new beginning, a new lease of life. In his own words, he is now truly born again.

On September 1, 2016, just weeks after his release, Sam spoke at the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship (FGBMF) chapter at Damansara Utama. His testimony touched many

lives when he shared about how real God was to him while he was serving his sentence in Kajang Prison. Quoting from 1 Corinthians 7:22, he fervently testified that although physically, he was locked behind bars, he knew deep down in his heart that he was already a free man.

Not wasting any time, later that same year, Sam started working with people who are involved in all sorts of vice, something that he had been all too familiar with when he was in his twenties. People who knew him from before were amazed by the transformation in his life. What seems impossible to man is possible with God.

Sam's compelling story of how a notorious gangster was transformed into a Christian social worker, with a big heart for those trapped in the underworld, has the power to touch and change lives.

This is his story as told to me.

Stephen Ng
27 October 2017

Chapter 1: The Robbery

IT WAS the night of September 13, 1988, a Tuesday. The time was 11.50pm. Mr. Tan was at his office in Jalan Ipoh, about to call it a day. His two bodyguards were with him, as usual.

Mr. Tan stood at about five feet seven, and was attired in a long-sleeved shirt and tight long pants. His bodyguards were also wearing long-sleeved shirts and sports shoes. On first impression, they looked like businessmen. No one would have expected that Mr. Tan was a boss in the underworld.

It's been nearly three decades, and I can't recall his full name or that of the triad gang that he was supporting, but my encounter with Mr. Tan that night would change my life forever. I have no wish to put him under any stress, but I hope if he gets to read this book, that he too will find the true meaning of life. After all, how many more years do we have to live?

In the underworld, we all knew that Mr. Tan was rich – filthy rich! From what I can recall, he owned a chain of hotels and restaurants which he had established using money gained through his involvement in illegal dealings. He was a very shrewd businessman, but the wealth he had was acquired through vice.

According to our boss Li Chai, Mr. Tan had borrowed some RM150,000 from him. Back in the 80s, this was a lot of money. I did not know why he had borrowed such a big sum from Li Chai, but I knew that often Mr. Tan would not pay back a single sen of borrowings from friends. He had a reputation for being a bad paymaster. Mr. Tan was in his forties at that time, and being older than most of us, knew that we were easy prey. I was 30 years old then; Li Chai was just slightly older than me.

Li Chai was in the transport business but behind the scenes, he was involved in illegal businesses as well. He

depended on me to help him deal with the triad gangs while he operated several night clubs, massage parlours and prostitution dens in and around the Chow Kit area.

On paper, I was an employee of his transport company with a salary of about RM3,000 a month. It was big money in those days, but I was not doing any ordinary work. My job was to collect debts. I was on flexi hours and could come into the office at any time, but on one condition – I had to be available to Li Chai any time he needed my help.

I had some 70 people working for me, my gang members. I took care of their needs using the money collected from the business community in our territory. In return, we would provide the businesses with protection from members of other triad gangs.

There were other cases where Li Chai's debtors had been slow to settle what they owed. My men would be tasked to "settle matters" and if they could not, I would personally handle the case for him. Since I was one of Li Chai's most trusted men, he depended on me to carry out this very important mission to collect the debt owed by Mr. Tan.

My approach in life was: "I just need to be daring, and I will surely succeed in everything that I do! Who in the world would dare to challenge me? I am unstoppable!" If I had applied this in a positive way in my life, I know I would have had a very successful career. Instead, I went all out to make a name for myself in the gangster world.

I prided myself on being an example to my gang members that anything was possible if we put our heart and soul into it. I was a big-time hero in their eyes. I was unafraid of anyone; rather, people were afraid whenever I showed my face.

THAT NIGHT, Fei Chai and Ah Chung were on standby in a car outside Mr. Tan's office in case we were ambushed, while Sei Ngan Chai and I rode our own motorbikes there. Initially we were denied entry by Mr. Tan's men.

“What do you want?” one of them demanded, raising his voice at me. By underworld reckoning, we had trespassed into Mr. Tan’s territory and were “looking for trouble”.

“Nothing much. We are here just to discuss business,” I replied politely. Even in the world of organised crime, we had our own code of conduct. Courtesy had its place, especially the more senior one became.

Whenever we entered into someone else’s territory to talk business, we tried to remain cool and not cause trouble unless our intention was to pick a fight. In order to be allowed into their territory, we had to play the game well and stay composed.

At that juncture, Mr. Tan saw me and since he knew me personally, he signaled to his men to allow me into his office. “It’s okay, let him in,” he told his men in Cantonese. “I know Sam.”

Sei Ngan Chai and I sat down in front of Mr. Tan and his two bodyguards. There was only a table separating Mr. Tan and the two of us. Sitting on the reclining chair in his modestly furnished office, he looked relaxed.

However, the tone of his voice was far from friendly. “What do you want?” Mr. Tan queried. Although he had invited us in, I knew that he was not convinced that I was there for any good reason. He wanted to know why I was sent to meet him this time. In the past, his guards had rudely sent off my men, but now Mr. Tan faced me. He knew I was Li Chai’s henchman, the gang leader, and he knew that he could not easily brush me off.

“It’s about the debt that you owe my boss Li Chai,” I answered. “My men came to see you on a number of occasions but were unable to collect the debt. This is not good as we are supposed to be in business. In business, when we owe money, we always return whatever we borrow from others. This time I am here personally on behalf of Li Chai, and I will make sure that we get back every single sen that you owe our boss.”

My tone was controlled. I was careful not to provoke Mr. Tan to anger. All I wanted was to collect the debt and return home safely. Then the job would be done, end of story! The last

thing that I wanted was a quarrel or fight. But things did not turn out the way I had hoped.

Mr. Tan remained adamant. He could have easily settled his debts, but he would not budge. He felt a sense of power as he had many followers, and thought that he was untouchable. Despite having prospered, he refused to repay his debt. He had breached the code of ethics in the underworld.

I told him that money borrowed had to be returned, and that he did not “give face” to my boss Li Chai when he refused to entertain my men who tried to collect the debt but returned empty-handed one after another. Finally, Li Chai had to assign me to do the job. Two bulls were about to lock horns.

Mr. Tan raised his voice, and I knew he was not about to give in. I began to lose my patience. Here was a man who did not know that I could send him straight to his coffin. “So what do you want?” he said, scowling. “Who do you think you are? If I do not pay your boss back, what can you do to me?”

His bodyguards were rolling up their sleeves, ready for a fight and to show their prowess. The conversation went on for another five minutes. There was no room for negotiation. A tough nut like Mr. Tan needed to be taught a good lesson. I was about to blow my top.

“This is not right, Mr. Tan,” I retorted. “This is too much. You think you can get away by not paying a single sen! Since you are insisting on not paying back, I am forced to use what I have, especially as the soft approach no longer works.”

I whipped out the gun I was carrying in my sling bag. Pointing the barrel at the wall, I pulled the trigger twice. The shots were deafening. Suddenly, everything stood still. Mr. Tan was stunned. The gunfire must have sent chills up his spine. His bodyguards, who were initially spoiling for a fight, retreated. They realised that they would end up as dead meat if they made the wrong move.

The tension was intense as seconds ticked by. Mr. Tan sat there, frozen. None of his bodyguards dared to interfere. From being a tough guy, Mr. Tan suddenly became a mewling kitten. He had no choice but to comply. He knew his life was hanging by a thread that could snap any time. At a pull of the



trigger, he and his two bodyguards could end up dead.

“This gun is the real thing! Now, do you want to pay? Since you don’t give me face and won’t pay what you owe us, I want you to open up the safe and take everything out. Don’t try to be funny, I can open fire any time. Open the safe NOW! If you still want to play the fool, I will not hesitate to shoot you first,” I said menacingly.

It was past midnight. I knew that I could not leave that place empty handed like the others whom I had deputised to collect the debt. My reputation was at stake. I could not report back to Li Chai with nothing to show. Where my men failed, I had to prove that I could do it.

Mr. Tan had no other option but to open the safe deposit box in his office and remove all the valuable items including gold and cash. It all happened in no more than five minutes. Within seconds after he handed over the valuables, we were out of the office. Before leaving, we warned them not to do anything foolish or I would not hesitate to shoot.

As I look back, my actions in those few minutes turned my life upside down and led to my being put behind bars. I was doing the bidding of my boss, but also protecting my own reputation. I had a gun and did not hesitate to use it. Had I shot someone, I would have ended up being sent to the gallows. Or I might have been shot and died at the hands of the rival gang. That was how foolish I was, and I had to pay dearly for my wrongdoing.

If I had the opportunity to reverse the clock, I would not have used the gun and would have swallowed my pride and told Li Chai that I could not convince Mr. Tan to pay. Instead, I chose to stick my neck out for my boss and for the sake of my reputation. But I paid the price when I was arrested and had to spend the next 28 years in prison.

Justice took its course swiftly. The following morning at about 10am, five detectives from the D9 unit of the Kuala

Lumpur Police Headquarters opposite the Pudu Jail came to Li Chai's office at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman. Although we were on opposite camps as "police and thieves", I knew the detectives and they knew me.

"Sam," one of them said me, "you are a suspect in a robbery case last night. Please follow us to the police station." My accomplice, Sei Ngan Chai, was also picked up by the detectives. Later, on the way to the police headquarters, they explained to me that Mr. Tan had lodged a police report on the previous night's incident at his office.

In a twist to the entire episode, Mr. Tan had accused us of robbing him using firearms. That was enough to put me behind bars, although the truth was that we were there to collect the debt owed to Li Chai. A crime had been committed, and there was no way I could get out of it. At first, I could not understand the implications of what I had done. I thought the case would somehow be settled and soon I would be free again.

"If it were a minor case, we could have settled it, but the police report stated that you had fired two shots and this is serious," one of the detectives told me privately. "There is very little I can do to help you. I am sorry, Sam."

There was silence as the words of the D9 detective reverberated in my soul. It was as if he was pronouncing a death sentence and my hopes of being set free evaporated just like that! When Li Chai heard about it later, he shook his head regretfully, saying: "I will hire the best lawyers to fight your case. There must be a way out of this."

The next morning, Sei Ngan Chai and I were taken to the magistrate court at Jalan Duta where the police had obtained a court order to remand both of us for 60 days. We were detained at Jalan Campbell police station. The 8 feet by 14 feet lock-up was shared by up to eight other detainees. There was no toilet in the cell, so I had to use plastic bags to relieve myself. The stench in the lock-up was unbearable and we had little room to even rest our heads when we slept at night.

We were only allowed to wear our underwear and nothing else. This was to ensure that we had nowhere to hide any

sharp weapons or contraband smuggled in. There were no lock-up uniforms in those days. At night, we were given blankets that were smelly and very dirty.

Sei Ngan Chai and I were separated from each other, and the police used this strategy to extract more information from us. They would tell me that Sei Ngan Chai had betrayed me, so that I would betray him in turn. In some instances, it was true that Sei Ngan Chai revealed certain information about our activities that he was supposed to keep secret. It made me angry but there was nothing I could do.

Within the 60 days, we were taken – often handcuffed and blindfolded – to different police stations for further interrogation by various investigating officers. We were at the Petaling Street, Gombak, Brickfields and Campbell stations, but never in the same police station at the same time.

I was taken to the night club where I had hidden the revolver. After the revolver was retrieved, I received my worst beating ever during police interrogation. The police wanted to know whether I was involved in any other robberies or possibly even murders. To possess firearms without a proper licence was a major crime, and using it for robbery or murder would mean a heavy penalty.

The police told me that I was being investigated under Section 3A of the Penal Code, but it never dawned on me what the punishment was. Sei Ngan Chai was being investigated under a different section which was less serious. He was merely an accomplice while I was the mastermind and main suspect. He had only to accept the offer from the police to be a witness, and he would face a lesser charge. That he betrayed me was understandable; but it was hard to accept that I had to face a stiffer penalty for possession of firearms.

After 60 days in the lock up, I was sent to Pudu Jail for a further remand of up to two years, while awaiting trial. This was the beginning of my ordeal and anguish as a prisoner. I became very angry and bitter. Li Chai and the lawyer visited me on two occasions, during the initial 60-day remand and later at Pudu Jail, but I was told there was nothing they could do for me because the case involved the use of firearms. It was

a dead end for me.

They stopped visiting me after I was sentenced to natural life imprisonment. In Sei Ngan Chai's case, his sister had hired a lawyer to help him. Sei Ngan Chai decided to take up the offer to be a witness against me, and so was sentenced to only nine years in jail and six strokes of the rotan. Because of his betrayal, my relationship with him soured. There was no peace in my heart. I used foul language constantly and cursed at everyone.

Childhood Days



Chapter 2: Childhood Days

I was born in Bentong, Pahang on August 15, 1957. It was a Thursday, just two weeks before Malaysia's Father of Independence and first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj declared, "Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" on the historic Saturday of August 31. If I had been born just two weeks later, I would have been a Merdeka baby. I am as old as the country since its independence from the colonial masters.

My parents were rubber tappers. They earned an average income of RM150 a month back in the seventies, and stretched that to feed all eleven of us children – my siblings and I made up a "football team". I had two elder brothers and two elder sisters, and three younger brothers and three younger sisters. I was the fifth in the family. The age gap between my eldest brother and me was 10 years, and my youngest sister and I were 20 years apart.

Our parents were busy making ends meet and had little time for us, but I realised later in life that they had done everything that they could for us. It was not easy raising eleven young ones with so few resources. I really appreciate them for their sacrifice and love for their children.

With the country still in its infancy, we had nothing but the bare necessities. Our home was just a wooden shack in a New Village in Bentong. Many people had been relocated to such New Villages set up throughout the country by the British colonial government under the Briggs Plan, named after Sir Harold Briggs who was Director of Operations in the war against communism in Malaya in the 1950s.

It was part of a military strategy to segregate civilians from insurgents in the then Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA). The latter had been trained by the British to fight the invading Japanese army but soon after the defeat of Japan, they sought independence from their colonial masters. They later formed the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). From 1948

to 1960, the MCP had led the insurgency in Malaya. Bentong was a hotspot for communist activism in those days when I was still a child.

The communists were masters at evasion. They were ordinary folks living in the villages during the day, but at night they would disappear into the jungles. They consisted of people of different races and from all walks of life. Some were young girls who were willing to pick up weapons in the jungles to fight. When ambushed or chased by the troops, they could suddenly disappear.

For a long time, the Malayan troops were kept wondering how the communists were able to disappear within seconds. The secret was an extensive network of underground tunnels built for escape, some leading as far as the Thai borders and beyond. It was therefore very difficult for the troops to track them down.

This was the state of the nation when I was growing up. I started my education when I was eight years old, in a small primary school which no longer exists today. From my first day at school, I liked learning. But my family situation and the environment at home were not conducive for reading or doing homework, and I was unable to concentrate on my studies.

With eleven of us, there were constant quarrels, chatter, and also lots of laughter as we siblings teased one another. We did not have the discipline to sit down to focus on school work. Our parents were too busy making a living to monitor our performance in examinations and they left us to fend for ourselves. Most of my brothers and sisters did not do well in their studies.

During those six years of primary education in Bentong, my school uniform and shoes were hand-me-downs from my older siblings. I was forced to be independent. Nobody took care of me as my parents and older brothers and sisters were busy at work.

At the age of nine, I had learned to prepare simple meals for my own breakfast and tea. By the time I was in Standard 4, I was cooking instant noodles. I washed and ironed my own school uniform, using a charcoal iron. At night, the lights

were very dim and it was difficult to study. As time passed, my desire to learn gradually diminished.

When I was in Standard 4, there was a Standard 5 boy who constantly bullied me, to the point that I could not concentrate on my studies. He would push me from behind, make fun of me, or kick me and make me fall. He was slightly bigger in size, and I was a scrawny boy for my age. I guess he did it for the fun of it, and found me to be an easy target and punching bag.

Desperate and feeling hopeless, one day I decided to tell my eldest brother: "I can't take it anymore! I don't want to go to school! This boy keeps bullying me. And the teachers are not interested in teaching the two of us anymore because they think we are troublemakers!"

My eldest brother and sisters immediately replied: "No, you are staying!" They were much older and had left school to work and supplement our family income. They were concerned that I would be a school dropout. Being elder siblings, they desired to see the younger ones completing their education, getting a good job and becoming successful.

My parents also chipped in. My mother tried to pacify me, "Son, all of you have attended this school, you are not the only one. If you do not want to go to this school, which school do you want to go to? Just pay attention to your teachers and show that you want to learn, and forget about this boy. If he still tries to bully you, just defend yourself but don't fight back. If you fight back, you will be expelled from school."

"No, I want to leave that school!" I insisted. I argued my case like a lawyer, telling them that I did not start the fight and I told the truth, but sadly, the teachers did not believe my story. I was like the shepherd boy who cried "Wolf!"

Eventually, after much persuasion, my parents relented and sent me to another school that was farther away. I liked the change, as everyone there seemed very happy. But I was disappointed again when after barely one week, I was transferred back to my former school. My parents gave the reason that in my previous school, my elder siblings could look out for me. But there continued to be frequent fights in

school and bullying by the bigger boys.

At secondary level, drugs and gangsterism were major problems, especially in the rural school that I attended. There were fights between rival gangs throughout the year and bullying was common. The teachers had little control over the gangsters.

I was never a bad hat or a troublemaker in school. In fact, I had a strong desire to learn. When some volunteers provided free tuition to the village kids, I attended the classes. They were four young ladies whom we called 'Big Sisters' and two slightly older men whom we called 'Big Brothers'. They were themselves rubber tappers living in the same village. They were kind and their lessons were very effective and interesting. Most of all, they were able to relate to us youngsters.

Tuition classes were conducted five times a week, from 7pm to 9pm, at the local town hall. Weekends were off. They helped me with my homework every day. I particularly enjoyed Mathematics. They also taught us about ancient Chinese history. They taught us memory techniques to help us remember things that we read, which I found particularly helpful.

When I was in Standard Five, I was able to follow the Standard six syllabus. This was because I followed their lessons very closely and did not miss even a single class. One of the 'Sisters' whose name I cannot remember now was especially patient in coaching me.

One day, for reasons unknown to us, all of them disappeared without a trace. The older villagers believed they were communists and had been either arrested or killed, or had escaped to another country.

To me, their disappearance was my biggest loss as there was now no one to guide me. I felt like a sail boat without a rudder. While I wanted to do my best in my studies to become someone successful in life, there was no one to help steer me to my destination. I could not depend on the school teachers to protect me from the bullies or help me with my studies.

It seemed my childhood was filled with one unhappy

episode after another. Adding to the problem then, my mother fell ill and became bedridden with a lung infection that nearly took her life. My eldest brother was very strict and used to scold me frequently and laid down many rules; to me, they were a lot of do's and don'ts. He would warn me that if I did something wrong, I would be severely punished by him.

Although I knew that he meant well, I resented him. As he was much older than me, I could not fight back. He and my two elder sisters worked to supplement the family income, while my second brother was the main one helping my parents. It was my second sister who looked after me most of the time.

At 13 years old, when I had just entered secondary school, I decided that it was time for me to venture out. After a lot of persuasion and negotiation, I was finally allowed to move to a new environment. My family, in the hope that I would turn over a new leaf, agreed to let me stay with my aunt who lived in Tiong Nam within Chow Kit.

The area was notorious and full of vice, and gangsterism was a real problem there back in the 1970s. The original plan was for me to complete my secondary education in Kuala Lumpur but I soon became involved with the gangs.

My aunt found me a part time job selling newspapers, comics, sugar cane drinks and cigarettes at a roadside stall. My first paycheck was a mere RM15. By the third month I was drawing a salary of RM30. This was only RM1 per day, but back then you could have a bowl of noodles for just 20 sen. My aunt and her husband had four children to take care, so I was left alone to fend for myself.

I attended a Chinese secondary school for a few years. The school had students who were gangsters, drug addicts, homosexuals and many who engaged in premarital sex. That was the kind of environment that influenced me. After Form Three, I dropped out from school and became a '*tai koh*' (gang leader) with some 30 people in my gang. Ten of them were from my secondary school. Even at a young age, we were already terrorising the Chow Kit area.



Chapter 3: My Journey Begins

FOR A SMALL town boy like me from a rubber estate, Kuala Lumpur was a whole new world. Everything seemed strange at first, but there were also plenty of opportunities for a young man to earn a living. The city was fascinating – the flashy cars, latest fashion, sexily dressed girls.

Unfortunately, I got off on the wrong footing. I was trapped in a lifestyle of gangsterism. My gang was attracting more members, but it was not easy for me to remain as the leader – I had to fight for everything. Deep down, I felt hollow and helpless.

The worldly attractions were a great temptation for a young man. I had only one thing on my mind: I wanted to earn big money fast and to have everything in life. Others who were doing the same job as me drew higher salaries because I was from a small town and easily taken advantage of. I was determined to make it big and never be poor again.

I was quite a rolling stone, and went through a string of jobs. In the early years, I worked as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant at Jalan Chow Kit. I was quickly promoted to be a kitchen staff and spent more than two years as a sous chef. My interest in cooking probably had its roots in my childhood days when I would cook my own meals. I have retained some of the culinary skills picked up in that kitchen. My favourite dishes were the *tai chow* or wok-fried variety.

I loved fashion and was soon attracted to the world of hairdressing, which I indulged in for over two years, enjoying my work. From there I moved on to pick up the art of tailoring and learned skills like cutting, tacking and sewing. I was a trend setter in the 70s and my fashion designs attracted many clients.

Most people, however, were unaware that I was involved in less savoury activities. My favourite pastime was selling ‘black market’ cinema tickets at the Capitol and Federal

cinemas in Chow Kit. I would get about 200 to 300 tickets from the manager and my men and I would peddle those tickets at higher prices, making fast money.

Sometimes we could sell the tickets at double the price. This is because we created an artificial shortage and the demand for tickets would shoot up. Courting couples who had come a long way to the cinema often did not mind paying more to watch the movie. We were opportunists who knew how to exploit the situation.

As a gang leader in the underworld, I learnt that no one could be trusted. Rival gangs were constantly trying to take over our territory by challenging our authority or, like gladiators in Ancient Rome, they would challenge us to a fight to see who was stronger. It was during that time that many triad leaders invited me to join them, enticing me with the prospects of earning quick money. But in reality, I remained only a pawn used by the rich and powerful.

In those days, Campbell Complex was one of the few shopping complexes in Kuala Lumpur. There was a group of gangsters who were creating trouble for the nightclub there. The owner asked if I could help to “take care” of his nightclub.

With our presence, the security guards knew they had an easier job. Even the police acknowledged that our being there meant they had less to worry about in the area under their jurisdiction. They knew that as long as Sam and his gang were taking care of the place, no one would dare to create problems.

Most of my gang members worked as nightclub bouncers and were involved in the prostitution racket. They were constantly recruiting more members since the more they recruited, the faster they were able to rise up the ranks. If they were caught, often things could be settled with cash at the police station.

In 1979, I made a trip to Songkhla in South Thailand. There I bought a .38 Smith & Wesson Special for 6000 Bahts or the equivalent of RM600. I paid for the revolver in Thailand, then waited in Kelantan to pick it up. It was expertly smuggled in by a syndicate. In those days, guns could also be procured at

the Thai army camps at the border and anyone who wanted some shooting practice could do it at those camps.

The gun I bought was meant to protect the gang. With the weapon in my possession all the time, I felt a sense of power. Whenever negotiations went awry, I only had to take the gun out and put it on the table, and everyone would sit up and pay attention to what I had to say. Most people knew that I had the gun tucked away at my waist or in my sling bag. No one dared to challenge me.

At that time, I would bring my gang members with me to collect protection money from shop owners in Chow Kit every month. If the owners refused to pay, we would create havoc at their business premises. There would be no peace for them and business would be badly affected for anyone who dared to go against us!

I also worked as a nightclub bouncer and massage parlour captain. They employed me to take care of their business and to deal with troublemakers. Besides that, I also operated as loan shark, lending money and charging exorbitant interest rates.

My gang members and I were regularly involved in fights with rival gangs who tried to encroach into our territories. Everyone wanted to expand his own territory to cover a bigger area, and collect more money. By the early 1970s, I was also involved in armed robberies.

The police were always on our back. Whenever they had an operation, some of us would be arrested. I was detained and investigated under Section 117 of the Penal Code (abetting the commission of an offence by the public, or by more than ten persons) on a number of occasions. But Li Chai, who was my boss by then, would settle it with the police and bail me out.

This went on for some 15 years. I had a fixed daily routine. Every morning, I would wake up at about 10am and go to a nearby salon to have breakfast with the girls. It was our meeting point, as there was a fixed phone line by which people could contact me if needed. By noon, my gang members and I would go out for lunch and discuss our

plans. Most of the time, I operated in the background. Being their leader, they would come to see me only when there was something they could not handle, and I would then go and settle it for them.

Table talk between my gang and our rivals was common, and it would usually end up in a fight. The fact that they came to challenge our authority meant that they were prepared to fight. Sometimes, there were people who would create trouble just to gain attention. It only took one wrong word and mayhem would break out, with tables flying.

As the gang leader, I was involved in table talk two to four times a week, often to help resolve issues on behalf of my gang members. Sometimes, it could be a quarrel over a girlfriend, but often it was over the control of gang territories. By then, my gang and I had joined Hong Moon 3821, one of the biggest gang networks in Malaysia, and I had 70 members under my care.

Hong Moon was part of an international network with operations in a number of countries, and strong ties among the 'brothers'. If you committed a crime in your country, you could escape to another country where Hong Moon comrades would help to look after you.

Every year, Hong Moon held a banquet at a five-star hotel but only selected guests could attend. They had recruiters in Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan and many Western countries. The gang provided training for its new recruits. Under their brotherhood, gang members had a safety net. If anyone was sent to prison, their wives and children would receive assistance. We would also visit comrades in prison. It was this strong bond that made us a very powerful organisation.

Members were provided with two meals a day and whenever we had guests from other towns, we would rent a room for them and pay their expenses. Therefore, we had to allocate at least RM20,000 to cover monthly expenses. The funds came from protection money and other forms of 'donations' received from the shop owners in Chow Kit.

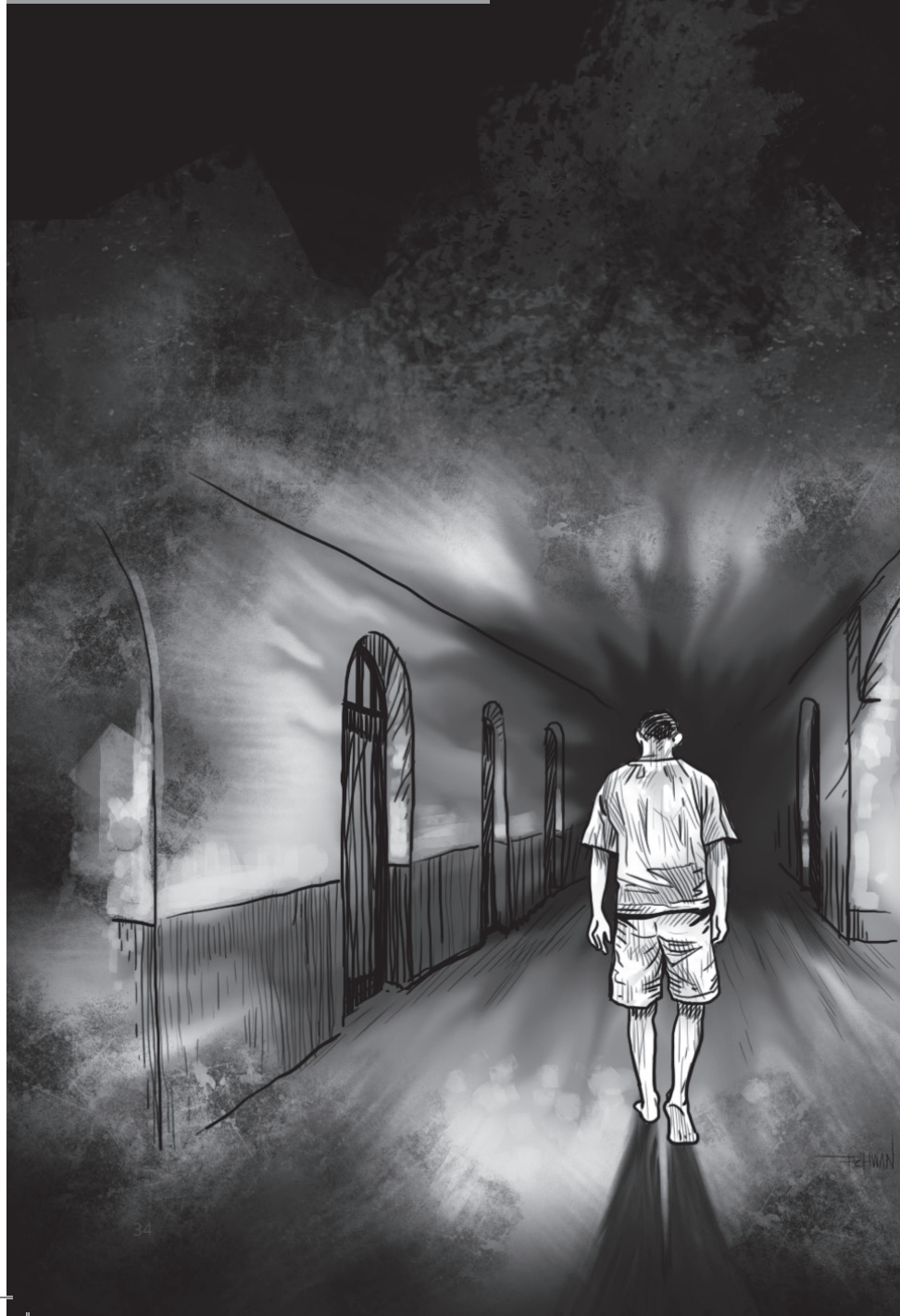
This was my life – filled with street fights and all manner

of illegal activities. Every morning, as I stepped out from my Chow Kit flat, I would see people sniffing drugs, girls offering their bodies in prostitution, young men extorting money. Gangsterism and the attendant vices had earned Chow Kit its notoriety.

Being arrested by the police was commonplace. One morning, while having breakfast at the Robin Hood coffeehouse on the ground floor of Campbell Complex, I was arrested. Someone had reported my involvement in a fight the night before. A new manager at the premise I was at had told us to leave so that he could close shop. He had spoken rudely, saying: "Who do you think you are, staying so late? Do you think this is your house?" Without warning, I had given him a punch.

After I was bailed out, his boss came to speak to me: "Why did you beat up my manager? This makes it difficult for me, as I have lost face." "He is the one who started the fight and caused trouble," I insisted. "If you want to patch up, give me an angpow now! Otherwise, what do I tell my boys? I was picked up by the police because of him, and I have also lost face."

Each time I was arrested, my 'elder' in the underworld would bail me out. This is why when I was finally sentenced to prison without a date of release, I was shocked and bitterly disappointed. Never did I expect that I would be imprisoned for two years in Pudu Jail while awaiting trial, and then in Kajang Prison for life.



Chapter 4: Behind the Walls of Pudu Jail

THE PROCEDURE for “checking in” at Pudu Jail entails a thorough body search by the wardens – including in the mouth and, to my great humiliation, the private parts. They had to make sure that nothing that could be used as a weapon was smuggled in. I was then photographed with my prison number and for the next two years I was known simply by my number.

Standing in line, I was asked to strip and change into the prison shirt and short pants. This was the beginning of my journey behind prison walls, into a cold harsh world that knew no mercy. In jail, I met people like myself, some of whom used to be my gang members and others who had been my rivals. Depending on the strength of my case, I knew that I would have to spend at least two years in Pudu Prison.

In those days, we knew of Wong Swee Chin, the infamous Botak Chin of Hong Moon Gang 386, who had been executed years earlier. He had been one of the most dangerous gangsters in the country in the 1960s and 1970s. The nickname ‘Botak Chin’ did not refer to baldness. It was derived from three words in Hokkien, ‘Bo Tak Chin’ which meant ‘no work’ (bo tak) Chinese or Chin. Wong’s name was also Chin. Others said the nickname was the acronym for ‘Barisan Orang Tak Ada Kerja’.

He gained notoriety for his part in numerous armed robberies that involved huge amounts of cash. He used to live in Batu 3, Jalan Ipoh, and back when we were operating in our own territories, I knew Botak Chin and his brothers. His court appeal and application for a royal pardon were rejected, and he was hanged at Pudu Jail on June 11, 1981. Now here I was in the same prison where he had been locked up in solitary confinement for many years.

Although the execution had been eight years earlier, Botak Chin's story was still fresh in my mind. I wondered, would I end up with the same fate? Awaiting the date of my trial was the most painful time in my life. The waiting seemed to stretch on forever. Each day brought another dreadful 24 hours where every minute felt like an eternity. I had never appreciated the freedom I had until I was placed behind bars. In my heart, I knew that the future was very bleak for me.

I found myself blaming others, but not my own foolishness. At that point, I could only see that it had been Mr. Tan's fault. If he had been more honourable in his business dealings and repaid the debts that he owed, I would not be languishing in a prison cell like this.

And Li Chai, my boss to whom I had been totally loyal, did not even lend a hand to get me out of prison. If only he had kept to his word that he would protect us whenever we got into trouble! Maybe this time it was simply not within his power, even with the best lawyers in town.

But one thing I knew was my own fault: Why couldn't I have swallowed my pride and told Li Chai that Mr. Tan refused to pay? Why did I have to whip out the pistol and fire those two shots? I managed to get the money back for Li Chai but ended up in prison! I could not accept my actions. I must have asked a thousand times, "Why? Why? Why?" I punched the walls many times in frustration. But there was no answer, only silence.

Life in Pudu Prison was very tough. We had a strict routine. Every day, we would wake up at 7am when the doors were opened one by one. Carrying a pail each, we would march two by two to fill it with water. This small pail of water was to last us the whole day, for both drinking and washing up. By about 11am, we were back in our prison cells. When wardens changed shifts at 2pm, we were again released from our cells. We had our lunch, followed by an early dinner at about 4pm. By 6pm, we returned to the cells and remained there until the next morning.

The wardens were addressed as 'Cikgu'. Since I was new in the prison, the Cikgu in charge of my block queried me about

my case and why I was there. It was as if they had not heard of me, the head of the notorious Gang 3821 known to everyone in the entire Chow Kit area. Here in prison, I had to respond to the Cikgu's questions respectfully. For once, I felt small. Cikgu had a baton with him all the time, which he used when anyone misbehaved, so I complied with his orders.

The cell I occupied was 10 feet by 14 feet and held 10 to 15 persons. Each person had about 3 feet by 3 feet of space. It was so cramped that sometimes we could hardly move about. We had to take turns to sleep as space was limited – some would sleep in the morning while others would sleep in the night. The room was infested with lice and bugs. As a newcomer, bedbugs kept me awake most nights so that by day, I was sometimes very sleepy.

There was no toilet facility in the room, just one plastic bucket to do our 'business', and the human excretion was not removed until the next morning. We had to get used to the stinking smell. Once when I was carrying the bucket to empty it, there were a few pages of the Bible covering it. A prisoner who had become a Christian asked me, "Why do you use the Bible to cover the bucket?"

I answered: "I don't know. It was done by my cell leader." When I asked my cell leader about it, he merely laughed: "It is only a Bible. We are not Christians. Who cares?" I accepted his answer. It was only much later that I realised how precious the Bible was, and I would tell other prisoners that if they had any torn pages from the Bible, they could pass them to me. I told them that for us Christians, the Bible is God's Word.

Some prisoners used pages from the Bible to make cigarettes. "If you were a staunch Buddhist and I used pages from your holy book for cigarettes, would you allow that?" I asked, hoping they understood why Christians would not want the Bible to be used that way.

In those cramped conditions, many of us were not in the right frame of mind and were easily agitated. At the slightest provocation, we would put our fists up and someone would get punched. Fights broke out often. I was in despair and wild thoughts were running through my mind. The horror of

staying in Pudu Jail still gives me nightmares to this day.

At meal times, there were no tables and chairs, and we ate sitting or squatting around the hall. At one point, I refused to eat anything for almost one week. The food was hardly edible; the rice smelled repulsive and it was served with salted fish and bean sprouts every day. The fish had a rotten odour. The older inmates advised me to eat, otherwise I would not survive. They warned that I would become so weak that I might easily succumb to sicknesses and die in prison. From then on, I struggled just to keep myself alive.

In those two years, I saw heroin and all kinds of drugs available in jail, including drugs that were not easily available outside!

The prisoners were always looking for opportunities to smuggle things in to sell. In my earlier years in prison, I was involved in smuggling contraband, including drugs. There were three of us who worked together and I would be in the background providing support. We were able to bring things into the prison when we returned from court or hospital. I did it because that was the only way I could earn money to hire a good lawyer. A senior lawyer had wanted to charge RM15,000 to fight my case.

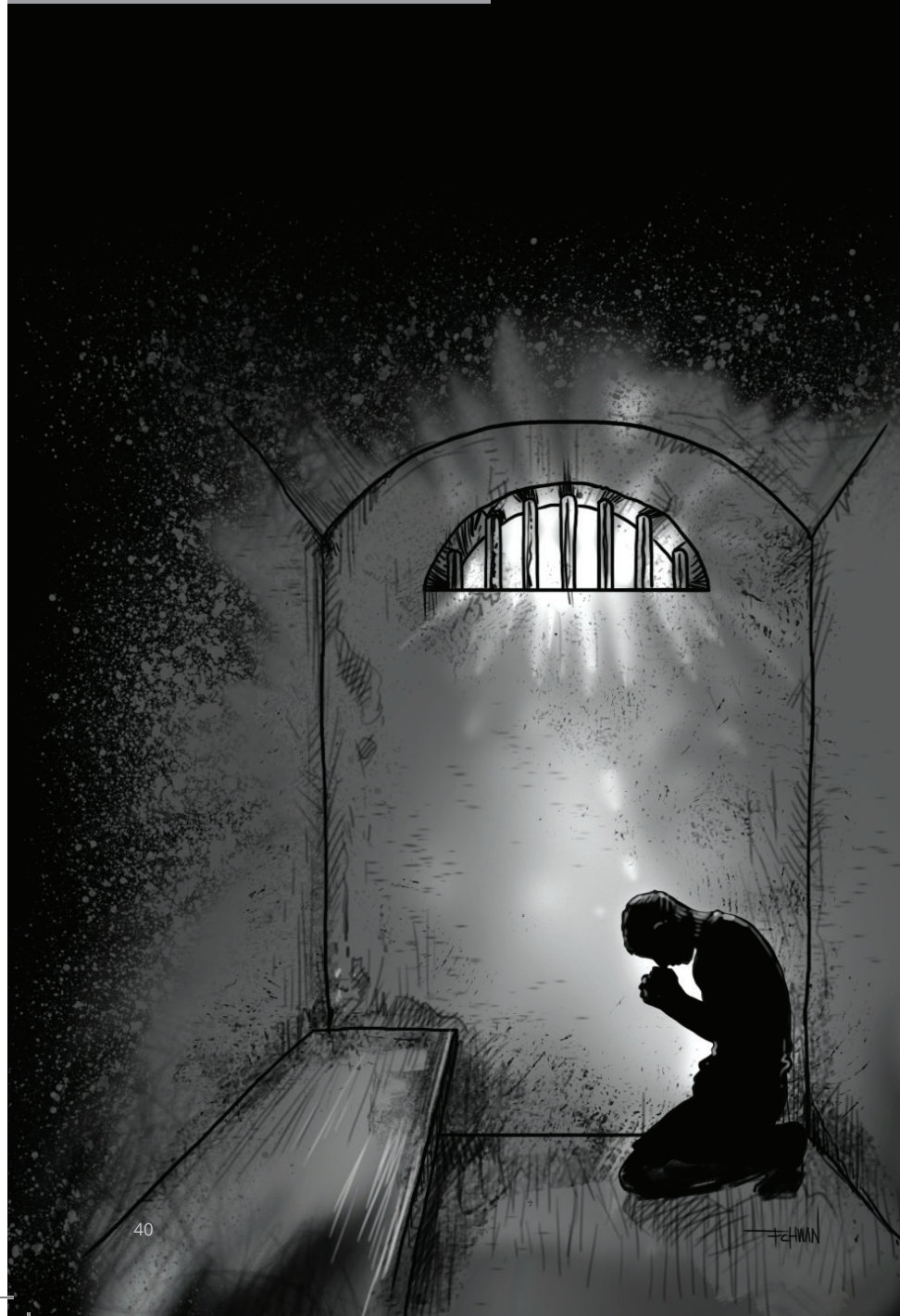
During one inspection, some prisoners were made to take laxatives and one of my men was caught for having three packets of drugs in his stomach, each weighing about 2 taels (74 grams). When charged in court, he won the case because the lawyer had argued that the prisoner had picked up the packets from the bucket where several others had excreted. The prosecutor could not prove beyond doubt that the packets of drugs belonged to him. For that reason, he escaped.

There were whistleblowers who were out to get me and my men into trouble. At one time, the wardens found some money and weapons stashed away in the library where I was in charge. As a result of that, the library in the Pudu Jail had to be closed.

After the prison authorities installed scanners, it was more difficult to smuggle things in, but some prisoners were so creative they still succeeded. If they had put their creativity

to good use, they would have contributed a lot to society. But sadly, they had been misguided and their actions had landed them in prison.

At that juncture, I did not know how long I would remain in Pudu Jail. If I had a chance to reverse the clock, I would! At 31 years of age, most people would be building their career or starting a family. Sadly for me, in the prime of my life, I was facing prison walls without any hope.



Chapter 5: To Kajang for Life

I WAS INITIALLY charged under Section 3A of the Penal Code for discharging a firearm. However, my lawyer convinced the court that there was insufficient evidence to incriminate me. Thinking that I would be set free, I was exhilarated, but my excitement was short-lived.

I was subsequently charged under Section 4 of the Penal Code for possession of a dangerous weapon. The lawyer explained to me that if I was found guilty, it would mean life imprisonment. I was deeply worried and could not face the thought of being in prison for the rest of my life.

The trial was held at the Kuala Lumpur High Court, then situated at Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad. This was before it shifted to Jalan Duta. My lawyer had prepared me in advance, saying there was very little chance of winning the case. He was right. On September 13, 1988, the moment finally came for judgment to be pronounced. I was convicted of robbery and possession of a firearm, and sentenced to natural life imprisonment without a date for release. I was devastated.

By then, I had spent two years at Pudu Jail. Being moved now to Kajang Prison to serve my sentence, I felt I was doomed to die in prison. My first three years at Kajang were the hardest for me. I blamed everyone for the punishment I received. For me, there was little meaning left in life. What hope can there be for a prisoner serving a life sentence, never to experience freedom again in this lifetime?

I found myself sinking into self-pity. “Why didn’t my leader Li Chai help me? I have given my whole life to serve him and helped him solve all his toughest cases. Why couldn’t the lawyer that he hired help to fight my case? Is there really no hope? Am I going to rot here?” I was like a drowning man, with no lifeline to hang on to.

After I was sentenced, Sei Ngan Chai was also sent to Kajang Prison. On a number of occasions when we bumped

into each other, I came close to bashing him up. I was still furious at him for his betrayal. He was later transferred to another block to keep him away from me.

Unable to accept my fate, I swore and cursed at everyone and everything, but my anger was futile – life imprisonment was the reality that I was staring at. While most young men my age were busy with family and career, here I was locked up in a prison cell, with only the wardens and other prisoners for company. I, the once-powerful Sam Kian Seng of Hong Moon 3821, was rotting away. If only I could change my circumstances!

Humanly speaking, there was no hope. But strangely, it was here at Kajang Prison that I finally found new meaning in life. That happened when I encountered God, and my life was turned 180 degrees around. I had to be brought down to my knees before I could see that there was Someone far greater than Sam Kian Seng. My pride dissipated, and I began to see a great light.

There may be people who do not believe in God, but this is my own testimony which no one can dispute. It was God who made all the difference in my life. Right there in Kajang Prison, I found Jesus and accepted him as my personal Saviour, and God changed my heart and gave me new hope and meaning in life.

NEW LIFE

Reflecting on my past, it became clear to me that I had been enslaved in the underworld, powerless to escape. Even though I was free to make my own plans, I was in effect a pawn in the hands of those who were powerful and had the means to pay for my services. I felt fettered to a ball-and-chain, controlled by an unseen force that caused me to continually commit unlawful deeds.

I had worshipped idols in the early part of my life, something that my parents taught us to do since we were young. Those gods were supposed to protect me from harm. But here I was in prison, and I realised they were as helpless

as I was and could not set me free. That made me extremely frustrated at one point.

I had very little contact with Christianity before I entered prison and whatever I knew of the “foreign religion”, I brushed aside. I acted tough on the outside, but deep inside I was searching for something more to life. One day, not too long after I entered Kajang Prison, I was invited to participate in weekly gatherings organised by Malaysian Care.

I was curious about this bunch of Christians who taught the Bible. I asked myself, “What can this God do for me?” I had worshipped many different gods before but none of them was able to help me. Could this Jesus do something to set me free? I decided to check it out. So every Tuesday and Sunday, I would attend the meetings. After all, I had plenty of time in prison to while away.

This went on for 12 months. In that time, something stirred in my heart. Finally on February 15, 1992, in my own prison cell, I made a decision to ask this God of the Christians to take control and change me. Kneeling down, I prayed, “God, I believe that your Spirit is present here, even in prison. I know I deserve to be punished for whatever I have done in the past. God, please forgive me. Thank you, Jesus for dying for my wrongdoings. Thank you that after three days, you were raised from the dead, giving us true hope that there is life after death. Now I want to acknowledge that Jesus is my Saviour.”

That was my turning point. I felt peace like I never had experienced before, and my life took a 180 degree turn. I began reading the Bible from cover to cover. I managed to read the whole Bible four times in a year. Someone had given me a bilingual Bible earlier and when I first began reading it, I was skeptical about the miracles that Jesus performed. For example, He changed water into wine and also fed thousands of men with just a few loaves and fishes. But after I came to know Jesus, I prayed for wisdom to help me understand scripture.

What’s more, with the help of an Oxford dictionary, I picked up English as I read and eventually was able to

properly pronounce words. Within six months, I could speak reasonably well in English! It was amazing as I had learned very little English at school.

I also started sharing Bible lessons with my fellow inmates who had accepted Jesus as their Saviour, and even baptised some of them. People in prison could see the difference that Jesus made in my life. The change was a gradual process, but the peace in my heart was real and permanent!

The Bible has many stories about people who were put in prison. One of them was Joseph who was wrongly accused and jailed. But God had a special purpose for his life, and Joseph went on to become the prime minister of Egypt. Another example was the apostle Paul, who served God while in prison. Despite being in chains, he had many opportunities to share the gospel with people he came into contact with.

Similarly for me, I found new purpose in prison and my life took on a new dimension. I was no longer resentful and angry. It was a spiritual transformation. I believe as a “new creation”, I will continue to be transformed to be like Christ until I meet Him face-to-face one day. I was experiencing what the apostle Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

I was set free from the power of sin through Jesus’ death. Having been “crucified” with Him on the cross, I am now dead to sin and I can experience the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. My desire for God increased greatly, and from the point of my conversion, my time in prison was well spent preparing me for what lay ahead.

I read widely. After I became a Christian, I stopped reading novels and turned to books on Christian living. Most of my free time was spent reading and because the light inside the cell was very dim, I soon had to wear glasses.

I remember several books that were especially helpful. There was a copy of “Peake’s Commentary on the Bible”, that was left behind by Tan Koon Swan, a former MCA president. It is a commentary on the Bible providing information on

Biblical archaeology and the latest discoveries of biblical manuscripts. “History of the Bible” also helped me a lot in my understanding. Besides that, I bought a Bible dictionary with the help of a Christian brother who visited the prison.

I even took up Bible correspondence courses from the United States, and obtained 17 certificates which earned me a diploma. After my release from prison, I took the opportunity to enter Tung Ling Seminary in Subang Jaya and completed a course leading to a certificate in Chinese Ministry.

As I started going through the whole Bible, I began to understand more about God and developed a deep reverence for Him. I could see for the first time that He was holy, and I was but a helpless criminal. I knew I had to accept the blame for what I had done. I confessed my sins one by one, and asked for God’s forgiveness.

By His death on the cross, Jesus had dealt with man’s biggest problem: Sin! In other words, whatever wrong I had done in the past, God willingly forgave me on the basis that my sins had already been dealt with when Jesus was crucified.

As God changed my life, my passion to serve Him grew. I helped many other prisoners to sort out their guilt over their past and helped them onto the right path. One fellow inmate who led our worship sessions weekly unfortunately continued to smoke drugs and created a lot of trouble. Disturbed by his lack of reverence, I began to pray for God to change him and at the same time, I also asked God to equip me to lead the worship every week, which I eventually did.

By then there were already 60 men attending the worship services regularly. The sessions were held at the common hall used by Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. Our singing was rather loud, causing complaints from other prisoners. As a result, the chapel services were eventually stopped by the prison wardens.

At that point, I decided to worship God in my own room. Soon, others joined me and the crowd grew even bigger than what we had at chapel. It was an amazing demonstration of God’s Holy Spirit working in the lives of the prisoners. Finally,

the wardens decided to let us use the community hall again as a regular venue for worship. Praise God!

A sense of God's awesome holiness motivated me to do things that I could not have done in my own strength. I also faced many challenges as there were some prisoners who were jealous of our growing numbers. They accused the newcomers or freshies of joining the chapel service not to worship God but to smoke. I was called up to the warden's office and questioned.

"Sam, I understand that newcomers are using the chapel service as an opportunity to smoke. Is that true?" the warden asked. "There have been complaints. If it's true, we have to ban freshies from joining the chapel service."

"I cannot deny that a few of the newcomers are taking advantage of the time to smoke," I replied.

"I am sorry, we have to lock up the newcomers," the officer said.

I then requested to visit the newcomers in their cells one at a time. The officer was surprised and asked why I would want to do that. I explained to him that newcomers faced a lot of personal struggles, including coming to terms with being locked up for years.

"Cikgu," I said, "most of these newcomers who are thrown into prison need God's Word. I want to spend time talking to them about the Bible. I believe if Jesus can change my life, He will also change their lives if they are willing to accept Him."

"If that is what you want, okay, but we will have to keep the cell locked until about one o'clock, when they come out for lunch."

That was how I began ministering to individuals. During that time, there were many prisoners who gave their lives to Jesus. God was very much at work inside the prison cells. Some of the prisoners told me that they could not accept being in prison for 10 or 20 years. I told them: "Look at me, I have a life sentence. How is it that I can overcome the anxieties within me?"

The change in me extended to my speech, and I found myself rejecting vulgar language. That was surely God's Holy

Spirit at work, as previously, swearing was second nature to me. God's miraculous work of transforming my life was truly amazing.

Before I accepted Christ, I was chain smoking 40 cigarettes a day. I had always wanted to quit smoking but was unable to do so. Now with God's help, I went on a 72-hour period of fasting and prayer, and I was delivered from my addiction overnight! I have not touched a cigarette for more than 15 years now. I learned from the Bible that my body is God's gift which the Holy Spirit dwells in me. I realised then that my body deserves the best care and I should not take it lightly.

BLUE SUIT

Before long, I became a senior in prison. Seniors have the privilege of moving about more freely in the prison blocks. This was about the time that the wardens had given me permission to visit the newcomers in their cells. The freshies were invariably full of regret for being in prison, and they were very much comforted when I shared passages from the Bible. Having experienced new life myself, I was convinced that God's Word had the power to transform the lives of these prisoners.

I would say to some of them, "Uncle, look at me, I am in prison for life and yet I can go through this. You can, too – never give up. We must have hope because even the word 'hopeless' begins with the word, 'hope'."

They soon learned to trust me and appreciated that I was there to help them through their toughest times. Often, I would give away my bars of soap and other toiletries to those who needed them. Even some prisoners whom the wardens found difficult to rehabilitate were touched when I shared the Bible with them – that is how powerful God is!

The transformation in my life was evident to everyone. Sometimes if a group of them were discussing something inappropriate and I approached them, they would quickly change the topic. They realised that I was with them, but I was no longer one of them.

Because of this change in mindset, I was able to handle things differently from the way I used to in the past. Often when there were squabbles among the prisoners, they would come to me to help settle the problem. One issue was which television programme they could watch. The prisoners knew I was the one who managed to get sponsors to buy the television set, so out of respect, they would consult me.

Formerly, I was inclined to take the side of the Chinese prisoners. However, God helped me to view people differently, and I handled the dispute in a way that was fair to all. I proposed that the Indian prisoners watch their movies on Saturdays; while on Sunday afternoons, the Chinese prisoners would get to watch their channel. The Indian prisoners would have to choose either a Hindustani or a Tamil movie but not both, as that would deprive others of their favourite programme. The prisoners soon respected me as they could see that I was not biased.

In my time in Kajang Prison from 1990 to 2016, one heartwarming episode was when I became a 'Blue Suit' prisoner, a first for someone on a life sentence. A Blue Suit is a model senior prisoner with special responsibilities and privileges.

It took me three months to get my application approved. Many people were surprised that I was granted permission, but it was God's plan and not my own doing. Before this, no prisoner on life imprisonment was allowed to be a Blue Suit. But after I had proven myself, several others were also promoted in other prisons around the country.

Whenever the wardens had difficulties with certain prisoners, they would ask the Blue Suits to help out. I received wages of just RM1 a day. It was not the amount that mattered, but the responsibilities and status. We were equivalent to "half a Cikgu".

As a Blue Suit prisoner, I was allowed to accompany four to five other prisoners from their blocks to other parts of the prison, or escort them to see the warden, doctor or lawyer. I would also accompany prisoners who went out to work at factories. This meant that in one day, I could be walking some

20 kilometres within the prison compound. Of course, this helped me to improve my health.

On the flip side, being a Blue Suit prisoner was not easy. If I refused an order and displeased any of the officers, they would get back at me by finding fault with petty things. There was one occasion when I took 30 prisoners to our prison chapel. One of the officers yelled at me, “Why are you taking so many prisoners at one time? You are supposed to accompany only four or five people at the most.” Other officers were not so particular and would allow me to bring them all in double file to the chapel.

There were also prisoners who were envious and would make false accusations against me. Fortunately, most of the officers knew me well and did not believe them. Some of the officers even defended me because they knew I could be trusted. What a change from my earlier years! I owe my transformation to one Person alone: Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6: Changed Lives

AS I GREW in my faith, I was able to reach out to many other prisoners and encourage them. God gave me a compassion for the lost souls in prison. One of the people I connected with was Ah Kit.

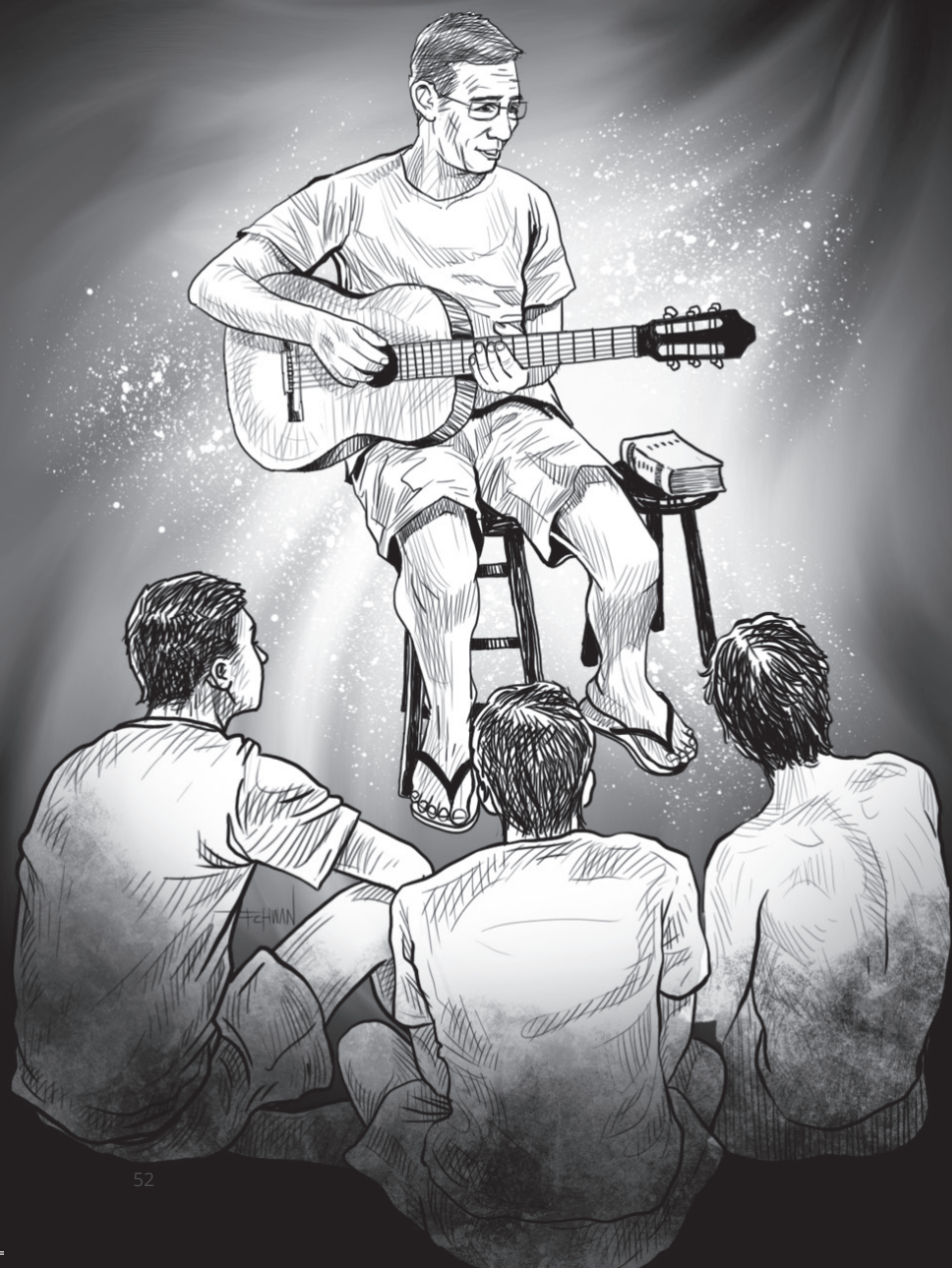
Ah Kit attended the worship services that I conducted for Christian inmates. With my guitar in one hand and the Bible in the other, I would lead a group in worship and teach scripture. Ah Kit was a Christian but his faith was weak and he easily fell into temptation and worldly pursuits. But as we spent time together, I was able to help him totally submit his life to Jesus once again.

Ah Kit had given up all hope in life and thought it was better for him to commit suicide. He had attempted to take his life during detention. This is a common situation among prisoners. In Kajang Prison, he came to join us at the worship services and I soon became acquainted with him.

I can vividly recall how initially Ah Kit dared not pray in public for fear of being ridiculed. Neither was he bold enough to lead worship and play the guitar. His reason was that he was afraid of making mistakes. But when I shared with him that he did not have to depend on himself but just allow the Holy Spirit to guide him, Ah Kit learned to depend on God and began to use his God-given talents during our gatherings. All glory and praise to Abba Father! This is just one of the many changed lives that I was privileged to witness.

Another prisoner, Ah Man, came into Kajang Prison in 2003. He was a devoted Siamese Buddhist who would pray fervently in his prison cell to his gods, including Kwang Kong. He had always believed that his gods protected him from all kinds of accidents.

Occasionally, when Ah Man came to see me in my prison cell, I would take the opportunity to explain the gospel.



Sometimes, I visited him in his cell and prayed for him. For nearly one year, I shared the gospel with him whenever I had opportunity, but he was not ready to receive Christ.

One day, Ah Man himself came to my cell to seek prayer. He looked very desperate and helpless. He could not hire a lawyer to defend his case. Together, we prayed trusting that God would help him with his case. I told him to trust God for everything. He was much comforted after we prayed.

His original sentence was five years. Under the parole system, his prison term was reduced to 40 months or 3 years and 4 months. Two months before his release, Ah Man came to my cell and told me that he was ready to receive Jesus as his personal Saviour. Step by step, I explained to him again how Jesus came into this world to die on the cross. Because we are all sinners, Jesus had to die to pay for the penalty of our sins. Then, I invited him to pray this prayer:

“Dear Lord Jesus,

I know I am a sinner. I thank You for dying for my sins. On the cross, You shed your blood for the forgiveness of my sins. I invite You to come into my life as my personal Saviour and Lord. I know that You were raised from the dead on the third day. With this, I have the hope of sharing eternal life with You. Thank You once again for loving me. Amen.”

Ah Man started attending the worship service every week until his release. After he was released, he worked as a chef and later joined the construction industry. I am still in touch with him today.

There was another prisoner in his sixties from Salak South, whose nickname was “Old Man”. He had been involved in a kidnapping case in which he and two accomplices had demanded a ransom of RM50,000. When he was arrested, he was charged for possession of a firearm. In prison, he was frequently involved in quarrels.

Sometimes, he would come to seek my help to resolve some of his issues. Gradually, I shared with him that God has a purpose for each of our lives, but unless he was willing to accept Him, he would not be able to find fulfilment in his life. For over one year, I shared with Old Man about God’s love for

him. But his heart was hardened.

One night, I had a dream that Old Man visited my cell and knelt down, asking me to pray with him the sinner's prayer. I immediately told him to get up as I was just a servant of God. I awoke and realised it was a dream. The next morning at about 9am, to my astonishment Old Man actually came over to my cell asking me to pray with him to invite Jesus into his life as his personal Saviour. He then asked to be baptised.

This is just one instance of how God communicates his purposes to His servants through dreams and visions. He showed me ahead of time what He was going to do with the life of Old Man. After he was released from prison I lost touch with him, but I hope to meet him again someday. I know that if that is not possible in this lifetime, our reunion will be in Heaven.

In Kajang Prison, there were a number of Africans as well. Solomon was a Nigerian who was doing time for printing counterfeit money. He had been a Christian but his faith was not grounded in God's Word and he was lured by worldly trappings. He slipped into a life of crime that resulted in his prison term of seven years. Going by the parole system, he would be in jail for 56 months or 4 years and 8 months.

As I shared God's word with Solomon, he agreed to read the Bible himself. I lent him materials from the Bible correspondence courses that I took. He also started learning to play the guitar. We used to sing and worship God together in my prison cell. I then invited him to join in the chapel service where he played the guitar.

After being released, he came to visit me once but was not allowed to meet me. However, he left behind some money for me to use. Of all the Africans whom I had shared with, he was the only one who came back to visit me. I learnt from others that he had registered himself as a student with a local college. Very tragically, he was murdered in the apartment where he stayed. Others who knew Solomon later told me that he used to share the gospel and play the guitar for the Christian Fellowship meetings at his college.

Ah Sin was about 53 years old when I first met him in

2005. He ran a family business with his siblings but had been betrayed by his own brothers who accused him of stealing from the business funds. As a result, he was sentenced to an 18-month prison term.

He was bitterly disappointed that he had tried to help his own brothers but they had conspired and put him behind bars. Ah Sin gave up his faith in Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy. He told me, "I prayed to Kuan Yin every day for the last 35 years, yet I am here in prison. How could this happen to me?" I managed to share with Ah Sin that Jesus went through exactly the same situation that he himself had gone through. Just as he had been betrayed by his family members, Jesus was also betrayed by one of his own disciples.

Ah Sin used to tell me about the pain in his body whenever he slept. He would feel numbness in his legs spreading up to the rest of his body. I told him, "If this happens again tonight, you must pray and in Jesus' name ask the numbness to leave your body." That night, Ah Sin prayed and asked God to remove the numbness. God truly worked a miracle and answered his prayer! Excited, the next day, Ah Sin asked to receive Jesus as his personal Saviour.

Another prisoner was Ah John, who was in his thirties. He came into Kajang prison for a second time in 2005 for his involvement in an armed robbery, to serve a three-year term. I told him that I knew he was involved in some kind of cult. This surprised him.

"How do you know?" Ah John retorted.

"I know because I have been observing you from the time that I got to know you. You do not have any peace of mind at all," I replied.

He then opened up, "Yes, whenever I sleep at night, I experience numbness in my body. What can I do?"

"If you experience numbness again tonight, you must ask Jesus to help," I told him. "Pray and cast out the numbness in your body in Jesus' name."

The next morning, Ah John came over to tell me that God really did remove the numbness when he prayed in Jesus' name. He was ready to accept Jesus as his personal Saviour.

Within a short time, we prayed and I led Ah John to invite Jesus into his life.

There was one Buddhist prisoner whose name I cannot recall. For one whole year, I had been sharing with him the gospel. Two weeks before he was released, he told me he wanted to receive Christ as his personal Saviour. After I was released I met him again and he thanked me for bringing him to Christ. There are many other stories similar to this.

The prison is also a haunt for evil spirits and I personally experienced God's supernatural power over demonic forces. One time when I was asleep in my cell, there was the sound of heavy breathing. This went on for a few nights. Whenever I turned to the left, I could feel the breathing on my right; when I turned to the right, the breathing was on my left.

Realising that it was a demonic spirit after the third night, I remembered that I should command the spirit to leave the prison cell in Jesus' name. I did that and the sound of heavy breathing gradually retreated, 'leaving' the prison cell through the small window.

There is another testimony I wish to share. Because the window of my prison cell was very close to a bell that would be rung every 45 minutes, I was unable to sleep uninterrupted at night. I spoke to the prison wardens, requesting for the bell to be moved elsewhere, but they said it was not possible. I decided to commit the problem to Jesus in prayer and from then on, even though the bell continued to be rung, I slept soundly at night and never woke up in the middle of the night again.

In one of the cells, some prisoners would go into a trance and invite spirits into the body. Usually this was done secretly, and the prisoners would ask the spirits for four-digit numbers or other favours. One prison warden even won a cash prize of a few thousand Ringgit when he bought the four-digit number given by a possessed prisoner.

Others would ask for advice, such as if they should hire a lawyer, and if they did, whether the lawyer would be able to win the case. One time I tried to join them in their cell, but was stopped by some of the prisoners.

“Sam, you cannot come in,” they objected. “You don’t come and disturb us.”

I told them that the Most High God had asked me to join them to see what was taking place. The moment the trance started, I immediately rebuked the spirit in Jesus’ name. The spirit left the prisoner who was in a trance. While some were amazed, there were others who did not like what I did.

One prisoner who went by the nickname Ah Ngau Chai used eggs to play with spirits. When an egg was left overnight, a spirit would leave a pinhole in the egg shell and make the contents of the egg disappear completely. Soon, the spirit started to disturb Ah Ngau Chai, making it impossible for him to sleep well. When I learnt about this, I advised him not to play with spirits anymore. In Jesus’ name, I rebuked the spirit. That night, Ah Ngau Chai was able to sleep soundly.

These and many more such incidents demonstrated the power of Jesus’ name and led many to believe in Him. All glory to God in the highest!

Chapter 7: Released a Free Man

“For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman.” (1 Cor 7:22a)

I COULD not believe my ears! When I was told I had received a royal pardon, I was stunned ... and then thankfulness welled up in my heart. I had not expected to be released. Although I had always prayed and yearned to be released from prison, I knew my chances were slim and did not pin any hopes on it.

I had repeatedly asked the prison wardens to apply for a royal pardon for me. Each time, they would tell me that the application had been rejected.

However, God is gracious and He accomplished what for man is impossible. In 2014, a Christian brother, Samuel Ho, brought my case to the attention of the managing director and CEO of the Star Media Group, Wong Chun Wai. Wong was very encouraging, and when he met me he said, “Sam, everyone deserves a second chance or a third chance”

He helped to push for my release and with his support, my application was given due consideration by the Agong, and I was finally pardoned. On July 25, 2016, I walked out of Kajang Prison a free man. I owe my freedom to a wonderful community of people who supported me and campaigned tirelessly for my release, and above all, to a faithful God who did not forsake me.

I was already 59 years old when I was released, having spent 28 years in prison. The most productive years of my life were gone, but I knew no experience would be wasted after I found Jesus. While in prison, I had the opportunity to tell others about God’s love that was so vividly demonstrated by Jesus’ death on the cross, and I helped many to turn over a

new leaf.

What would I do with myself and my newfound freedom? Deep down in my heart I knew I wanted to help others who were in the same boat as me. At the darkest time in my life, I had experienced God's amazing love for me as revealed in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

At least 2000 years separated me from Jesus, yet when He died on the cross, He was doing it for me. That's the extent of His great love for me! I now wanted to share this hope with others who felt hopeless.

With the help of Malaysian Care, arrangements were made for me to stay in Rumah Petros, a halfway home for former prisoners. The first thing I did was to visit my family members to renew our ties. They were happy to meet up with me after so many years and see that I was a free man. They now had families of their own.

At the same time, the city of Kuala Lumpur which I once knew as a young man was beyond recognition. However, all the vices and their attendant problems were still much the same as 30 years ago, probably even worse than before.

My desire to read God's word continued to grow. With encouragement from brothers and sisters in church, I decided to sign up for seminary education at Tung Ling Bible School in USJ Subang Jaya. I completed the certificate course in Mandarin Evangelism just 40 days after I was released from prison. On top of that, I also completed the Emmaus Bible correspondence diploma course in Chinese.

I am currently working in Sahabat Pudu, run by the Full Gospel Assembly for the past 19 years. It is a Street Ministry that helps many lost souls who are in need. In my first eight months there, I met some of the people I knew in prison. Some of them were what we would call hardcore; but today, because of Jesus, they have been transformed from within.

I do not know what the future holds for me, but one thing I know – I will wait on God to direct me. Scripture says, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall

mount up like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31) I believe that God will raise me up and guide my path as I continue walking with him, one day at a time.

Many people have asked me why I am working with Sahabat Pudu. One of the triad gang leaders even offered to pay me RM10,000 every month if I would return to the underworld and be one of his henchmen.

I politely declined, telling him that nothing compared with the gain of knowing Christ. I desired to make Jesus known to more people, and He has promised to prosper me. “Why study the Bible?” he asked me, puzzled. I replied: “Because the Bible is God’s Word and His Word has the power to transform lives.” The triad leader could not understand me at all.

If in prison there were many temptations, I am aware that in the world outside, I will face even more. I am grateful for the constant prayers by others for me to persevere in my faith. I am certain that the things that happened in my life were God’s lessons for me, preparing me to face the future. I believe God has worked all things out for good according to His perfect plan and timing, and He continues to do so. I look forward to see what He has in store for me ahead.

My prayer is that this account of my journey from Natural Life to New Life, my Kajang Redemption story, will bring hope to many.

Released a Free Man



Sam Kian Seng (right) taking a walk in Petaling Street which has changed so much since he last visited it. With him is Rumah Petros house leader Martin Claude Balhetchet (left). ROYCE TAN / The Star, 26 July 2016

Released a Free Man



Watch the video on Sam's journey at:
[http://www.thestartv.com/
episode/courage-to-change-the-journey-of-sam/](http://www.thestartv.com/episode/courage-to-change-the-journey-of-sam/)

